

## Reimagining Education in India: The Curricular Vision of the New Education Policy 2020

Dr. Garima Aggarwal,  
Assistant Professor,  
Shyama Prasad Mukharji College, University of Delhi

### Abstract

*The National Education Policy (NEP) 2020 is a major overhaul of the education system in India. One of the key areas of focus in the NEP is the curriculum. The NEP proposes a number of changes to the curriculum, including a shift from a focus on memorization to a focus on critical thinking and problem-solving, a reduction in the amount of content in the curriculum to make room for more experiential learning, a greater emphasis on Indian knowledge systems and values, and a more flexible curriculum that allows for greater customization at the state and school level. These changes are designed to make the curriculum more relevant to the needs of the 21st century and to prepare students for the challenges of the future. The curricular reforms proposed in the NEP have the potential to transform the lives of millions of students.*

**Keywords:** *National Education Policy 2020; Curriculum design and content; Vocational education; Multilingualism; Teaching methods and materials, Technology in education.*

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### 1. Introduction

The education system of India was largely shaped by the British colonial government, which emphasized and promoted the supremacy of English language and culture, and marginalized Indian languages and cultures (Agnihotri & Khanna, 1997). The system also focused on imparting academic knowledge and neglected the development of important faculties such as critical thinking and problem-solving. This top-down system had little or no participation from Indian stakeholders. These aspects of the British colonial government were effective colonising tools and have caused an indelible impact on how the education system of India functions. Even today, the Indian education system continues to be largely English-medium, and there is a strong emphasis on acquiring academic knowledge. Critical thinking and problem-solving skills are not as emphasized as they should be (Niranjana, 1990). The education system is still largely top-down, with little or no participation from Indian stakeholders. There have been some efforts to decolonize the Indian education system in NEP 2020, but these efforts have been met with resistance from some quarters. It is critical to recognize the colonizing

characteristics of the Indian education system and endeavor to decolonize it. This will necessitate a thorough and methodical approach that prioritizes critical thinking and problem-solving abilities over academic knowledge, encourages the use of Indian languages and cultures in the classroom, and adopts a more grassroots approach to education that involves increased involvement from Indian stakeholders. This paper examines the carefully considered modifications to the curriculum that NEP 2020 suggests in order to accommodate more experiential learning, increase the focus on Indian knowledge systems and values, and create a more flexible curriculum that permits more customisation at the state and school levels.

### **1.1. The NEP 2020: A New Vision for Education in India**

The National Education Policy (NEP) 2020 represents a significant transformation of the Indian educational landscape. The first significant overhaul of India's education policy since 1986, it was agreed by the Union Cabinet in July 2020. The NEP 2020 suggests several modifications to the educational framework, including: A focus on holistic education that develops the child holistically, not just their academic skills. This includes physical, social, emotional, and intellectual development, a greater emphasis on Indian languages and cultures. This includes making Indian languages the medium of instruction at the primary level and incorporating Indian knowledge systems and values into the curriculum; A more flexible curriculum that allows for greater customization at the state and school level. Schools will be able to adapt the curriculum to meet the requirements of their students and communities as a result; A new 5+3+3+4 structure for school education. This means that students will spend 5 years in the foundational stage, 3 years in the preparatory stage, 3 years in the middle stage, and 4 years in the secondary stage; A focus on vocational education and skill development. This is seen as essential for preparing students for the workforce of the future; A commitment to making the education system more inclusive and equitable. This encompasses initiatives like offering mandatory and cost-free education for all children up to the age of 18, along with tailored support for children with disabilities.

### **1.2. Curriculum Design and Content**

The new educational system in India strives to revamp the curriculum and teaching methods to better address the diverse requirements of various age groups. The proposed 5+3+3+4 design divides education into four stages: Foundational Stage (Anganwadi/preschool and Grades 1-2), Preparatory Stage (Grades 3-5), Middle Stage (Grades 6-8), and Secondary Stage (Grade 9-12). This design offers several advantages, including:

- It is better attuned to the developmental requirements of children. Each phase of the new system is tailored to address the particular needs of children at their respective ages, potentially resulting in improved learning outcomes.
- It provides more flexibility for students. Students can progress through the system at their own pace, which can help them to reach their full potential.
- It permits a higher degree of curriculum customization. Schools have the ability to adapt the curriculum to suit the requirements of their students and local communities, potentially resulting in improved learning outcomes.
- It is crucial to factor in the necessary resources and infrastructure for the effective execution of this system, yet the potential benefits are substantial. By addressing the diverse requirements of various age groups, the prospective impact of India's new educational system on enhancing learning outcomes for all students is noteworthy (Arora, 2020).

The new policy highlights the importance of streamlining subject curricula to allow for the integration of critical thinking and comprehensive learning approaches. These encompass methods like inquiry-based, discovery-based, discussion-based, and analysis-based learning (NEP 2020, pp. 11-12). The curriculum will focus on fundamental concepts, principles, and problem-solving approaches (NEP 2020, pp. 11-12). Additionally, experiential learning, including hands-on education, arts integration, sports, and storytelling, will be adopted as a standard teaching style across disciplines to highlight their interconnectedness (NEP 2020, pp. 11-12). Secondary school students will have increased opportunities to choose electives, including physical education, arts, and vocational training, to better prepare them for future careers and lifestyles (NEP 2020, pp. 13). The emphasis will be on holistic development, and academic and vocational paths will be integrated, breaking down the strict separation between arts and sciences, humanities, and natural sciences (NEP 2020, pp. 13).

### **1.3. Teachers, Teaching Methods, and Materials**

The New Education Policy of 2020 acknowledges significant gaps in teacher preparation, recruitment, deployment, working conditions, and agency (Saxena, 2020). To address these issues, several measures are proposed:

- Scholarships based on merit will be awarded to exceptional students, with a focus on those hailing from underprivileged rural regions, for a 4-year Integrated Teacher Education Program (NEP 2020, pp. 20).

- In an effort to curtail teacher turnover and foster classroom stability, incentives will be provided to promote teacher placement in remote areas (NEP 2020, pp. 20).
- Teacher Eligibility Tests (TETs) will be improved by including more relevant and up-to-date questions, and teachers at all grade levels will be eligible to take these tests (NEP 2020, pp. 20).
- Based on state/UT-mandated clustering, schools will have the flexibility to consolidate teachers to ensure a suitable distribution of educators across various subjects (NEP 2020, pp. 20).
- Higher education institutions and public-school districts will receive encouragement to engage local community members or subject matter experts as 'master teachers' in fields like indigenous arts, vocational skills, entrepreneurship, and agriculture, with the aim of preserving and passing on local expertise (NEP 2020, pp. 21).

#### 1.4. **Evaluation and Assessment**

The National Education Policy (NEP) 2020 heralds a substantial transformation in the approach to evaluation and assessment within the Indian education system. This policy underscores the significance of prioritizing formative assessment over summative evaluation, marking a departure from rote memorization towards fostering critical thinking and problem-solving skills. The NEP 2020 also emphasizes the importance of holistic assessment, which takes into account all aspects of student learning, including academic, social, and emotional development.

The NEP 2020 outlines several targeted modifications to the evaluation and assessment procedures employed within the Indian education system. These alterations encompass the adoption of diverse assessment techniques like essays, projects, and presentations to gauge student learning. Additionally, performance-based assessment is encouraged, necessitating students to showcase their knowledge and skills through practical real-world tasks. The policy promotes self-assessment, enabling students to introspect on their own learning and identify areas for improvement. Moreover, peer assessment is encouraged, facilitating students in providing constructive feedback to their peers on their work. The NEP 2020's proposals for evaluation and assessment are a significant departure from the current system. When executed efficiently, these modifications carry the potential to enhance the standard of education in India and equip students to tackle the demands of the 21st century more effectively.

### 1.5. **Marginalised sections**

The National Education Policy (NEP) 2020 has several provisions for marginalized sections of society. These provisions include:

- Free and compulsory education for all children till they achieve age of 18 years. This includes children from marginalized sections, such as Scheduled Castes, Scheduled Tribes, and Other Backward Classes.
- Dedicated measures for children with disabilities encompass the provision of accessible infrastructure, assistive devices, and tailored teaching approaches.
- Reservation of seats in educational institutions for marginalized sections. This includes reservation in central universities, state universities, and professional colleges.
- Financial assistance to students from marginalized sections. This includes scholarships, stipends, and loans.
- Training and capacity-building of teachers and other education stakeholders. This is to ensure that they are equipped to teach and support marginalized students.

The NEP 2020's provisions for marginalized sections are a significant step towards ensuring that all children have access to quality education, regardless of their background.

### 1.6. **Early Childhood Care and Education (ECCE)**

The NEP 2020 underscores the significance of early childhood care and education (ECCE) for children aged 3 to 8 (Anand, 2021). It promotes the integration of ECCE into the educational system and the delivery of ECCE services through Anganwadi centers, pre-primary classes within schools, and private ECCE centers. The policy introduces the concept of Foundational Literacy and Numeracy, which will be incorporated during the preschool years and the initial three years of formal schooling. Furthermore, the NEP 2020 prioritizes the promotion of multilingualism and advocates for the utilization of the mother tongue or regional language as the primary medium of instruction in the preschool and foundational stages of education. In addition to these changes, the NEP 2020 introduces a novel educational framework referred to as the '5+3+3+4' model, integrating preschool education with the formal schooling structure, which includes a two-year preschool period (NEP 2020, pp. 26-27, 48-49).

### 1.7. Vocational education

The National Education Policy (NEP) 2020 acknowledges the significance of vocational education and skill development in equipping students for the demands of the evolving workforce. NEP 2020 outlines several revisions to the delivery of vocational education in India, encompassing:

- Making vocational education more accessible and affordable. This includes providing financial assistance to students who want to pursue vocational education and making it easier for students to transfer between vocational and academic streams.
- Enhancing the relevance of vocational education in response to the economy's requirements involves synchronizing vocational education programs with the National Skills Qualification Framework and equipping students with the competencies sought by employers.
- Elevating the rigor and demands of vocational education entails augmenting the duration of students' engagement in vocational training and ensuring they gain exposure to real-world work experiences.
- Fostering the fusion of vocational education with academic education involves permitting students to concurrently pursue both streams and creating avenues for them to accrue academic credits through their vocational coursework (Mehrotra, 2020; Mathur et al, 2022).

### 1.8. Technology in Education

Incorporating technology into education holds promise for improving the teaching and learning processes, enabling access to information and resources, fostering collaboration and communication, and tailoring learning experiences (Puspitarini & Hanif, 2019). Nevertheless, it should serve as a complementary tool rather than a substitute for conventional teaching approaches.

The National Education Policy (NEP) 2020 places heightened emphasis on the integration of technology across all educational levels. It introduces initiatives such as the establishment of a National Educational Technology Forum (NETF), the enhancement of digital infrastructure, teacher training programs, and the inclusion of coding and computational thinking in the curriculum (National Education Policy, 2020). The NETF is tasked with devising and executing a nationwide strategy for technology utilization in education, while also ensuring that every school has access to the internet, computers, digital content, and educational resources for both educators and students. Furthermore, NEP 2020 underscores the pivotal role of teacher training in the realm of technology integration and advocates the

development of ethical guidelines for technology use in education. These forward-looking proposals within NEP 2020 regarding technology in education represent a significant stride in advancing the quality of education in India.

### 1.9. Conclusion

The rollout of India's recent education policy, NEP 2020, is poised to bring about far-reaching consequences for the nation's educational landscape (Murlidharan, 2020; Rastogi, 2020). Several noteworthy repercussions are on the horizon. Initially, there will be a heightened priority on multilingual education, with a particular focus on bilingual instruction and proficiency in students' native languages. This transformation holds the capacity to elevate educational standards for those students whose primary language isn't English while simultaneously championing linguistic and cultural diversity. Second, teaching and assessment methods will undergo significant changes. The NEP 2020 aims to move away from rote learning towards a more comprehensive approach that emphasizes conceptual understanding, application-based learning, problem-solving, and critical thinking. This will necessitate a transformation in teaching practices and assessment methods. Third, vocational education will receive greater attention and integration into the regular curriculum from the school level itself. This emphasis on vocational training will equip students with skills relevant to the local economy, thereby enhancing their employability prospects. Fourth, technology will play a more prominent role in education. The NEP 2020 envisions the use of technology, such as gadgets and digital resources, to enhance the quality of learning and improve access to education for all students. This will likely lead to increased adoption of e-learning and digital tools in classrooms.

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